

Kirby Lawrence Hill

Abington Presbyterian Church

May 20, 2018 Pentecost

Acts 2:1-18

SPIRITED ACTIONS

Kofi Annan is a diplomat from Ghana who served as the seventh Secretary-General or top officer of the United Nations from 1997 through 2006. Annan had proposed some reforms for the United Nations, hoping that it might work more effectively in maintaining international peace and fostering cooperation in solving international problems. Just six weeks after he began in that position, an op-ed in the New York Times was published, criticizing him for not completing the reforms he was seeking to make. He expressed his frustration about the opinion piece at a Security Council meeting. A Russian ambassador responded saying, “What are you complaining about? God created the whole world in six days and you have had six whole weeks.” Annan replied to him that God had one big advantage. God didn’t have to work through all the committees and Security Council and the General Assembly – God had gotten to work alone.¹

Today is Pentecost Sunday, a day that is called the birthday of the church. It is this day in the biblical account that makes it most clear that God has made a choice not to work alone anymore. Perhaps God has lost a certain efficiency as a result, but that seems to be the choice that God has made, using those who may not always be the best candidates for a challenging job, people like you and me, who like the first apostles, struggled with abundant fears and inadequacies while seeking to be people of vision, people who could boldly proclaim the breadth of God’s love.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, a time when we recall the dramatic events of a day long ago when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the followers of Jesus. Many people had gathered in Jerusalem for the traditional Jewish festival of Pentecost, held each year, seven weeks after Passover, to celebrate the giving of God’s law to the people. A great deal had happened in the seven weeks

since the crucifixion of Jesus at the time of Passover. Indeed, something now called Easter had happened. After experiencing the resurrection of our Lord in several settings, the disciples got to the place where they understood that they were no longer going to physically see Jesus. They must have felt almost like orphans left behind, with an aching nostalgia and a sense of emptiness from what they had previously known. And yet, they still must have anticipated that they who had shared many experiences and had learned much had a future together. What would that future be? What would happen to the heartache that Jesus' absence had left within them?

In an early Walker Percy novel that went unpublished in his lifetime, The Gramercy Winner, a character named Will Grey is in conversation with his psychologist, Dr. Scanlon.

“What’s the matter, Willy?”

“I don’t know, Scanlon. I’m homesick.”

“How long have you been homesick?”

“All my life.”²

There are those who have such a void inside that they try to numb it through substance abuse or by overscheduling themselves, so they won’t notice that inner longing. There are others who think that emptiness inside can be addressed by climbing over others to get to some imagined top of the heap. Some feel so empty inside that they decide to blame and denigrate others, even verbally or physically attacking others to try to help themselves feel more important or powerful. We each have felt a void within at some point, longing for a deeper connection.

Hildegard of Bingen, a German abbess, who lived nine hundred years ago, wrote, “God’s Son became human in order that humans would have a home in God.”³ This is a significant part of the purpose of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. It reaches its culmination on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is sent in the name of Jesus Christ. To those who felt orphaned, homesick for God, “there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it

filled the entire house where they were sitting....All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

They were filled. No longer was there such a void inside of them. Homesickness ceased to rule their hearts. Now the very Spirit of God would rule their hearts and help them to know they were a part of God’s family. And wherever they might be, there was a sense of home within them. What began almost two thousand years ago on the Day of Pentecost, continues today where people who may be unrelated to one another experience being part of the same family of God. We together are beloved children of God. Our spiritual home is not a place; it is a relationship into which the Spirit leads us.

It is a relationship which emboldens us to go beyond our comfort zones, to reach out to those who also need a spiritual home, to share God’s love with all who have a spiritual or physical need. We recognize our sense of home even as we journey together continuing to follow Christ. New possibilities for community and outreach have ridden into our closed-up world on the wind of God. The reasons to be homesick are gone with the wind and now there is a fullness of life and love we want to share.

There is an old African proverb: “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”⁴ God has sent the Holy Spirit to give us a togetherness in purpose and direction. God wants us to go far, empowering and emboldening us by the Spirit to do so, going far together in reaching out to those who have been pushed to the margins, going far in working together to continue the ministry of Jesus Christ, going as far as the most distant heart so we can say in words and deeds, “You too can have a home with us in God.” For some reason, God chooses not to work alone anymore. As we share the love of God in word and deed, we realize the loving Spirit of God that flows through us is the source of the ‘at homeness’ we can feel wherever we are. It is a Spirit that addresses our fears and inadequacies to the extent that we can venture out to live out the fullness of the love of God. God has decided not to work alone anymore, and we will find that our inner loneliness and longing can

be met in reaching out to and serving others with other followers of Jesus Christ. This work of the Spirit is almost two thousand years old, yet it is as fresh as the day that mighty wind blew in Jerusalem. Happy Birthday, followers of Jesus. Today is the first day of the rest of your lives to discover God's home for us and to show that loving home to others.

¹ <https://www.economist.com/node/4403347>

² <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/2007-05/homesick-0>

³ ibid

⁴ <https://www.passiton.com/inspirational-quotes/7293-if-you-want-to-go-fast-go-alone-if-you-want>